While preparing his weapons for the morning Spock covertly watched the youth at his meal. He seemed hungry, but ate neatly, using only his fingers, as slaves were taught. When he had finished he rinsed his hands in the bowl and came to assist his master to undress.

"The bath is through there," Spock indicated the rear of his tent. With no further instruction the Human bathed him deftly and wrapped him in a towel. Better and better.

"When you have cleared away the meal, you may bathe."

Lying propped up on the cushions of the bed, he watched as the slaved moved quietly about the tent. Occasionally there seemed to be a slight awkwardness to his movements, but that might have been mere shyness at being observed. His presence was pleasing rather than otherwise, he was far less intrustive than any other slave who had attended Spock.

Unbidden, curiosity stirred and Spock remembered the tales he had heard of these Humans, of their sensuality and responsiveness. It was impossible to arouse a Vulcan unless he consented, but Humans, he had heard, could be stimulated into sexual heat however unwilling they might be...and the youth was beautiful in his alien fashion.

"Bring me some wine," Spock directed as Kirk emerged from the bath. He took the silently offered goblet and sipped absently, gazing at the bowed, golden head. Curiosity fought with resolution and won. He did not wish for a permanent bed partner, but it would be interesting to test the truth of those old tales for himself. Making up his mind he set the cup aside and turned back the bed covers.

"Undress and come here."

The Human raised his head and the strange eyes were bright with fear; he stood, and his hand trembled as he unfastened the coarse tunic that was his only garment. He allowed it to fall and stood naked in the lamplight.

"By all the gods!" Spock swung himself up to sit on the bed, staring in horror and disbelief. From shoulder to knee the Human's pale skin was bruised and scratched; long weals furrowed his belly; the marks of teeth showed distinctly around his nipples.

"Turn around." More marks, the prints of a lash, some still bleeding, patterened the Human's back. His blood was red and had not shown on the dark tunic. His buttocks carried the imprint of cruelly-gripping hands, even to the crescent-shaped indentation of finger nails. Fresh, bright blood smeared his thighs.

Spock reached out. Involuntarily the slave shrank back, then checked and submitted to being touched. Spock lifted his hand and turned it, exposing rope burns on the delicate wrist.

"Who did this to you?"

"It was--Lord Savak, my lord. I tried to stop--the bleeding--"

"This must be tended!" Suddenly realizing that the youth scarcely had the strength to stand, Spock rose and steadied him. Again the slave flinched. "I am not going to punish you. Lie down." Impatiently Spock lifted and placed him on the bed. Then pulling on a robe he went to the doorway of the tent, called the sentry on duty and ordered him to fetch the healer.

The Human had understood that order. As Spock looked down at him he closed his eyes and slow tears ran silently down his cheeks. It was the first time Spock had seen a man weep and he had no way of knowing that it was the unexpected kindness that broke the Human's control. He knew, of course, that Humans had no more control over pain than they did over their sexual drives, but Kirk must have been in pain all along, yet he had shown no sign of it until now. It was very puzzling. The slave was a valuable possession, why had he been so abused? His claim that Savak was responsible Spock discarded as ignorance or deceit. No warrior would do such a thing.

The arrival of the healer interrupted his train of thought, and he retired to the far side of the tent while the man examined the slave.

At last the healer completed his work and approached. "I have given him a sleeping draught. The injuries are severe--these Humans are delicate and they cannot be treated roughly--but he will recover in time. To be blunt, if you use him sexually, you will lose him."

"What happened to him?"

"Isn't that obvious?" The healer snorted indignantly, taking advantage of his calling. "He's been violated, carelessly and brutally over a long period of time--most recently within the last few hours. There was internal bleeding. Unless you wish to kill him, leave him alone while he heals."

"I will," Spock promised. "What should be done for him?"

"For tonight, just let him sleep. I will return in the morning. That's the slave you won from Savak, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then he's in better hands, now. You know Savak's reputation."

Spock was not sure his own knowledge that Savak was a braggart and a bully was what the healer referred to, but he made no reply. One did not discuss a warrior's faults with his inferiors. When the healer had gone he stood looking down at the sleeping Human for a moment, then he shrugged, threw a cloak over the slender form, dimmed the lamps and retired to bed.

The following morning Kirk started abruptly awake struggling in panic at the touch of hands on his thighs.

"Be still, slave! Would you undo my work?" The voice was unfamiliar, but there was no threat in it, and he lay back, puzzled by the sudden relief from pain that had grown to be a constant of his existence. The hands touching him were gentle, and he recognized the yellow robe of a healer, so he let himself relax as his injuries were smeared with salve, then re-bandaged. He had a new master, now, and--Spock?--must have ordered that he be cared for; he felt grateful for a moment, then realized that he had been damaged too badly to be of use. The Vulcan was only ensuring that his valuable slave was made fit for further service.